

**INCREASE FUNDING FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS BY \$1 MILLION DOLLARS**

Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments

H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

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My name is Rich Luby. I live in Naugatuck; I am an individual with the abilities of Cerebral Palsy and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. I have many lived experiences that showcase the essential need for an increase in Connecticut's state funding for all five of our Independent Living Centers (ILCs). Thank you for your past support and ask that you increase funding for the ILCs by \$1M dollars annually.

I am the Emergency Preparedness Program Advocate at Independence Northwest, one of CT's five independent living centers. We serve the northwestern corner of CT. We are non-residential centers, and we serve people with ALL types of disabilities and of ALL ages. Our only criteria is having a disability. Our primary goal is to provide the necessary resources so that individuals can live their most independent lives within their own communities.

In 2004 the Governor appointed the State Independent Living Council to set a base level of funding for each ILC at \$550K per year, and in 2022, they are still recommending \$550K per ILC. In the past 17 years, the state has **never** achieved this recommended level of funding, and in fact, state funding for ILCs has been reduced. Please keep in mind, that in the last 35 years of ILC operations, the cost of living increased by 200%, resulting in deficits on top of reductions, which forced the ILCs to cut back on the towns we serve, lay off staff, reduced salaries, and instituted waiting lists. In comparison, New York ILCs are state funded at \$335K each and in Massachusetts, \$645K each; CT ILCs, at a much lower \$92K for each.

Under funding our centers is the wrong allocation of financial resources and doing so would more than likely cost the state far more money in years to come. In the simplest form, if you do not spend the money up front to ensure that individuals with disabilities are provided with the resources to develop and build independence, then you are left with many capable members of society now dependent on other state resources: **Medicaid for example.**

I am all about being financially responsible, but I am not about complacency and an inadvertent cap on expectations of this community. Proposing to maintain the ILCs' current funding or worse cut resources keeps the disability community more reliant long term on state run programs. Fund us, invest in us, allow the Centers to foster the importance of individual independence so that a once dependent community can provide a return on that state investment.

Independence Northwest's Emergency Preparedness program was created in direct response to the current pandemic. With the uncertainty of the virus, resources, response plan, and community information, we wanted to ensure that the disability community was involved in their local community emergency response planning and implementation. In a 24-month period our organization has established key partnerships with community leaders, state agencies, and regional emergency preparedness committees to ensure our residents with disabilities have a seat at the strategic planning table. Incorporating the voices from all vulnerable populations allows a community to have an inclusive action plan that meets the needs of the individuals they serve before, during, and after emergency scenarios. Our ongoing goal is to ingrain our 5 centers as disability resources for our local and state emergency preparedness professionals, in responding to the needs of their residents from the vulnerable populations.

Independence Northwest supports the Governor's proposed funding for increasing vocational services, technical education, mental health and domestic violence services\*; all are opportunities to improve independent living for people with disabilities. And with increased funding for the ILCs, we can be valuable resources and partners in those initiatives.

I urge you to increase the funding for the ILCs by \$1M dollars or more.

*Richard J. Luby*

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\* People with disabilities experience domestic violence at a far greater rate than the general population.